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ARRESTS, TORTURE IN ISRAELI OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Facts and Figures

In the face of increasing resistance to the policy of occupation and annexation the Israeli authorities started a sweeping campaign of arrests in the occupied Arab territories in mid-April, which is still continuing. Estimates based on available information indicate that three hundred and ninety persons have been arrested to date. The number is constantly increasing as police raids continue.

The victims of this vicious campaign include political leaders, intellectuals, engineers, medical doctors, trade unionists, workers, peasants and students of both sexes. They stand accused of belonging to the Palestinian National Front in the Occupied Territories (an organisation embracing all anti-Israeli occupation forces) and the Jordanian Communist Party. The Israeli authorities have not been able to pin any crimes on them so far, but even so the prisoners are being subjected daily to inhuman physical and psychological torture which has caused an indignant outcry from international public opinion. Democratic and peace-loving Israelis have also protested against the arrests and the detainees' maltreatment, calling for their immediate release. This special number of the Middle East Newsletter contains facts and figures obtained from the prisoners' Israeli lawyers, official Israeli statements as reproduced by the Israeli press and reliable sources in the occupied territories. In presenting this material, the World Peace Council urges all democratically minded people in the world to act urgently for the release of all prisoners from the occupied Arab territories in Israel's prisons, and to demand Israeli respect for human rights in the occupied territories.

Needless to say, peace and justice in the Middle East can only be achieved through the total withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied Arab territories and the recognition of the legitimate national rights of the Arab people of Palestine.

REPORTS FROM PRISON

In early June, the Israeli League for Human Rights published an advertisement in a number of Israeli newspapers, which said in part:

"On April 22, a wave of arrests in East Jerusalem and the West Bank started. The arrested are popular figures, workers, trade union leaders, students, all of whom are well-known to the Palestinian public... The authorities have for a long time prevented members of the detainees' families and their lawyers from visiting them in prison. Visits to a number of them were made possible only after obtaining a Court Order. The prisoners themselves have informed their lawyers and members of their families that they have been brutally tortured. Citizens of Israel, you cannot remain silent!"

The League also distributed a report on torture which was reproduced in a number of Israeli democratic newspapers, especially Zo Haderekh and Al-Ittihad.

NABLUS PRISON

On June 3, lawyers Hanna Naqara and Ali Rafi' met a number of prisoners held in Nablus Prison. The lawyers met three of them in the presence of Israeli Security men. The three are: (a) Mohammed Hijazi (thirty-eight years old, married, with three children and

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member of the Trade Unions' Leadership in the West Bank); (b) Mohammed Abbas Abdul Haq (thirty-seven years old, married, with three children, and an engineer employed by the Nablus City Municipality); and (c) Jamal Youssef Freitekh (forty-one years old, married, with three children, a construction worker). Each of the three had the following comments on his treatment at the hands of the Israeli Security forces.

a) Mohammed Hijazi:

He was brutally beaten at the moment he was transferred after his arrest to the Israeli Military Governor's Headquarters in Nablus. The beating was indiscriminate, and focussed particularly on his genitals. After three days of such treatment, he was transferred to the Israeli Military Governor's Headquarter in Ramallah. On arrival, he was suspended from the ceiling and beaten all night. Whenever he lost consciousness, he was taken to a small yard opposite the torture chamber and doused with ice-cold water. He said that his investigators told him; "We have killed Farid Altashtoush (a Palestinian patriot who died from torture in Israeli jails) in Nablus Prison, and we are ready to kill you, like him, if you do not confess... We can kill you, make you insane for the rest of your life, or expell you to Jordan."

He was later transferred by police ran to Al-Maskoubyah Prison in Jerusalem. In the van he was blindfolded and a sack thrown over his head which obstructed his normal breathing. He was constantly kicked by soldiers until he arrived at his new jail. In al-Maskoubyah Prison, his treatment worsened. He was denied drinking water, and was kept in a cell with common Israeli criminals who — in his free moments from torture — put cigarettes in between his toes and lit them. Later, he was moved to Nablus Prison where he was kept in solitary confinement, only to be moved to Sarafand Concentration Camp, a centre of more sophisticated torture. He was kept in a tiny cell, where he was forced to take off his clothes and his shoes and sleep on a floor of sharp stones with no covering. At other times he was forced to stand on one leg, hold a chair in his handcuffed hands while being brutally beaten by his jailers. He was returned to Nablus Prison before meeting his lawyers.

b) Mohammed Abbas Abdul Haq:

The two lawyers state that his share of torture was no less than that of their first client. They personally saw the cigarette burns on his body, and how sick he had become from the torture he had received. The prison administration denied him any medical care. He informed them that he was transferred from Nablus to a military concentration camp where he was forced to crawl on stones sharp as knives. Soldiers all throughused to ride him like a horse for fun, and tell him, "You are a donkey, and you must walk on all fours". He was beaten, and suspended from the ceiling. At present, he is kept in a small cell, handcuffed.

c) Jamal Youssef Freitekh:

His story is so similar to the two previous accounts that there is no need for further comment.

JERUSALEM'S MASKOBYAH PRISON

● On May 5, lawyers Felicia Langer and Walid Al-Fahoum were able to meet Hassan Abdul Majid Abu Khdeir, a student who lives in Arab Jerusalem, and who was arrested on April 22. He told his lawyers the following story:

Six days after his arrest, interrogation started. He was forced to drink two cups of concentrated salt, after which the following exchange took place between his interrogator and himself.

"Admit you are a Communist and a member of the National Front" (i.e. Palestinian National Front — Ed.)

"I am not a member of anything. I haven't had the honour yet."

"Then strip."

The lawyers continue describing the scene after that: Hassan stood naked before the interrogator, who then beat his genitals with a large truncheon. Hassan felt a flash of excruciating pain before losing consciousness. The next day he was called again for interrogation — abuse was hurled at himself and his family, and every attempt was made to humiliate him. He was then ordered to strip again, and the appalling procedure of the day before repeated.

● The same day the two lawyers met prisoner Omar Mohammed Oudeh, a twenty-four year old student from Arab Jerusalem. He told them that right after his arrest he was beaten with heavy truncheons for five two-hour sessions on his head and fingertips, ordered to lie naked on the floor while a burning chemical substance was applied to his genitals. He was threatened with electric shock treatment on his genitals, kicked in the stomach, kidneys and back, and forced to keep jumping up and down for hour-long sessions. The interrogators wanted him to supply information on his cousin Yakoub Al-Ibeidi and brother Abdul Rahman, whose whereabouts he did not know, and who are considered by the occupation authorities to be members of the Palestinian Resistance. He is accused of being a member of an organisation hostile to occupation, an organisation he knows nothing about. The lawyers add that they met him six days after his arrest on April 22, and that he looked very sick indeed as a result of torture.

● Lawyer Felicia Langer asked to meet detainee Mrs. Khadijah Abu Arkoob, a twenty-seven year old widow from Doora, near Hebron, who was arrested in January 1974 without any specific charges. She was answered that no detainee of that name existed. Only after strong protests was she able to meet her on June 13. Mrs Langer has the following to say on the case:

"Only after using the trick of asking her release on bail was I able to see her. She was brought before a judge, and only then I managed to exchange a few words with her. She showed me nail marks on her neck, saying that the interrogator tried to strangle her. She also showed me and the judge her hair which had been pulled out by the roots. She had it in a nylon bag. I tried to present it as evidence of torture to the court, but the judge refused to react at all. After she was released without any charges brought against her, she was rearrested on suspicion of being a Communist. I have no access to her, and nobody admits in which prison she is detained."

RAMALLAH PRISON

● On May 29, and after a strong campaign of protests, lawyer Felicia Langer was able to meet her client, Sulaiman Al-Najjab, a forty-year old political leader from the West Bank. The lawyer has the following comments on the meeting:

"He was handcuffed, and bore the unmistakable marks of severe torture. His interrogators had tried by all means to destroy him physically. He told me that he is regularly beaten until he loses consciousness. He is then doused with ice-cold water to revive him, and the beatings continue, including on the genitals. In addition to being handcuffed, his legs are in chains 24 hours a day. Interrogators take shifts interrogating him. He was also extended the special torture treatment of Sarafand Concentration Camp."

● Ahmed Mohammed Samara was arrested on April 22, and constantly beaten until his nose was broken.

● Ayed Abdullah (nineteen years old): his genitals and nipples were kneaded and squeezed until blood flowed from them.

● Adel Barghouthi: his whereabouts were kept secret for weeks after his arrest. When his lawyer Mrs. Felicia Langer succeeded in meeting him, he told of how his jailers had tortured him brutally, including beating, solitary confinement, applying electrical shocks to the genitals, suspension from the ceiling and finally, preventing him from sleeping.

● Ghassan Harb was brutally beaten on the head, finger tips and genitals, doused with ice-cold water whenever he lost consciousness and kept in solitary confinement. His health has deteriorated so much that his life is in danger. His wife, who met him recently, wrote to the International Red Cross demanding their intervention so that he could be moved to a hospital to receive medical care.

● Abdullah Al-Bi'rat: The prison administration denies knowing his whereabouts, but inmates in the Ramallah prison told their lawyers that he was kept in solitary confinement for two weeks, during which time he was regularly taken out for interrogation, and returned unconscious and covered in blood to his cell. They added that he lost his hearing as a result of the constant beating on his ears and head.

● Mohammed Shqeirat: Lawyer Felicia Langer attempted to meet him several times, but was always told that he was being held in Jerusalem Prison. In Jerusalem, in making enquiries, she was informed that he was in Ramallah prison. This went on for some time without her being able to meet him. His colleagues in prison, however, informed Mrs. Langer that he was in solitary confinement undergoing intensive interrogation and daily brutal torture.

OTHER PRISONS

- Lawyer Walid Al-Fahoum reported that after a long delay on the part of the occupation authorities he managed to meet his client engineer Husni Haddad, at Al-Maskobyah Prison in Jerusalem. (Mr. Haddad was arrested on April 22, but his legal counsel was only allowed to meet him nearly three weeks later). He described to his lawyer his treatment since arrest in the following manner;

"I was first kept at Hebron's prison, then moved to an unknown place which I learned later was a military concentration camp. There I was forced to stand on one foot carrying a heavy chair for a long time. I was always locked in a small cell the floor of which was covered with sharp stones. My hands were always handcuffed behind my back. Cigarettes were regularly put out in between the toes of my right foot. During interrogations, a heavy black sack was always thrown over my head which prevented my normal breathing."

- Lawyer Walid Al-Fahoum was also allowed after some delay to meet his client, Attalah Al-Rashmawi (a worker from Beit Sahour). He says that after Attalah's arrest on April 22, he was kept at Hebron's prison then moved to Ramallah prison, where he was interrogated for days. Attallah remembers the horrible events of May 5. On that day he was constantly beaten on his genitals during interrogation and clubbed on the head. From Ramallah, he was moved to Jerusalem's Al-Maskobyah prison, back to Hebron's prison then to a small cell in Bethlehem's Bassa prison. On May 25 he was moved to an unknown military concentration camp where interrogation started again. He was constantly tortured, day and night, with his jailers working in shifts. He was treated to the usual beatings, cells with sharp stones, standing on one foot, crawling, putting out cigarett ends between his toes, etc.

- Mohammed Sulaiman Atwan (56 years, from Arab Jerusalem) was arrested for the first time on April 23, released, and re-arrested a few weeks later. His interrogation on June 2 proceeded in the following manner: He was surrounded by four interrogators who beat him in all parts of his body, particularly on his back and genitals, then forced him to carry a chair on his head. He lost consciousness and when he regained it he was thrown out into the street with a summons to interrogation the next day. He immediately contacted his lawyer Mrs. Felicia Langer who noticed the terrible state he was in. A medical doctor who examined him found that he was suffering from a haemorrhage in his testicles brought about as a result of brutal beating he had received, and ordered an immediate operation. He was admitted to a hospital in Arab Jerusalem where a representative of the International Red Cross visited him on June 5.

WHY ARRESTS AND TORTURES

- On May 14, the Israeli authoritative daily, DAVAR, which has close connections with the ruling circles, published a report on the arrests in the occupied territories in which it qualified them as being "politically motivated" and directed basically against the Palestinian United Front in the Occupied Territories. It admitted that the "arrested committed no crimes" and that they had only been engaged in political activities.

- On June 26 Communist MP Tawfik Zayyad delivered a speech in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) in which he unmasked the real reasons behind the sweeping campaign of arrests. He said:

"In this campaign, many recognised leaders of the Palestinian Arab people have been arrested, among them communists, patriots and democrats. Their only crime is in being against Israeli occupation and championing the Palestinian Arab people's right to self-determination . . . The campaign is characterised by its political nature. Those arrested are progressives who are ready to accept a political solution to the conflict based on respect for the legitimate national rights of all peoples."

- On May 3, the Israeli Arabic newspaper AL-ITTIHAD had the following to say about the reasons for the arrests and tortures:

"It is no secret that the new arrests are politically motivated, and are aimed at crippling the broadest political mass organisation in the occupied territories — the Palestinian United Front . . . It is not by chance that the campaign started in the same week in which the Front started publishing its newspaper "Falestine", where it reiterated its programme: opposition to Israeli occupation, refusal to allow the West Bank be returned to Jordan and insistence that the Palestinian Arab people be guaranteed their legitimate national rights, including the establishment of their state on the territories from which Israel has to withdraw."

- Lawyers in Nazereth (Israel) described the arrests, in a protest memorandum to the Israeli government, as "political terror directed against the Palestinian United Front and its supporters, aiming at preventing the participation of the true representatives of the Palestinian Arab people in the Geneva Peace Conference. It also aims to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state on the territories from which Israel has to withdraw."

From the preceding paragraphs, the following conclusions can be drawn: 1. — the arrests are politically motivated; 2. — none of the arrested persons have committed any crime; 3. — the arrested are advocates of a political solution to the Middle East conflict on the basis of the UN Security Council resolution No. 242; 4. — the victims call for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and respect for the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian Arab people; 5. the victims have been and are still subjected to brutal torture.

CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE BACKFIRES

The Israeli authorities and the mass media connected to the ruling circles have cast a veil of silence over what is happening in the occupied territories, particularly in connection with arrests, tortures and persecution. Only occasionally will a leading Israeli daily or magazine publish a news item on the arrest of "saboteurs", or the police discovery of "dangerous elements". That's all. In the case of the present wave of arrests and terror, the authorities adopted the same tight-lipped attitude. Only families of the arrested, lawyers and the four Communist MPs in the Israeli Parliament defied this conspiracy of silence, trying by all means at their disposal to put the facts before the Israeli public and world public opinion.

The Israeli authorities, in their attempts to negate the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian Arab people, are trying by all foul means to stifle any voice raised against their occupation and annexation of the occupied territories and to portray those territories to the world as peaceful ones, enjoying the fruits of a "democratic and friendly occupation". They even exert considerable pressure to pull the wool over the Israeli public's eyes as to what is going on in those territories, fanning the reactionary chauvinistic sentiments which will facilitate the implementation of their schemes — the final denial of the existence of the Palestinian Arab people, and as a result the latter's legitimate national rights, as well as their being able to continue in their occupation of Arab territories.

However, this conspiracy of silence is not holding through. Many forces in Israel and the world are uncovering the facts daily with the help of the courageous and determined actions of the democratic and peace forces in Israel.

- On July 2, the Communist block in the Israeli Parliament demanded a parliamentary debate on arrests and tortures in the occupied territories, and proposed that Parliament should call an immediate halt to the torture and release all the political detainees, as well as form a committee composed of representatives of all parliamentary blocs to investigate complaints concerning torture. The overwhelming majority of the Parliament voted against the proposal, and refused even to discuss it. The chairman of the session — a leading member of the extreme right-wing Likud bloc — even threatened to lodge an official complaint against the Communist bloc for "violating the norms". The government admitted, in its answer to the proposal, that arrests were being carried out, but refused to elaborate further.

- The Israeli Court of Appeals censured the behaviour of the police and security departments for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of a number of arrested persons, namely Sulaiman Najjab, Khalil Hijazi, Jamal Freitekh, Husni Haddad, Mohammed Abu Gharbiyah and others, to their lawyer, and for obstructing that same lawyer from performing her duty. Lawyer Felicia Langer had lodged a complaint with the Court asking for a ruling allowing her to meet her clients.

- Lawyers Hanna Naqara and Ali Rafi' addressed a cable to UN Secretary General Dr. Kurt Waldheim, during his Middle East tour in June, in which they asked for the world organisation's intervention to end the torture of over 100 political prisoners in the occupied territories and to obtain their release. The cable stated: "The detainees have been subjected to all sorts of brutal torture. We appeal to you to use your good offices to obtain the immediate release of these detainees and to end all kinds of torture of political prisoners."

- The Israeli League for Human Rights held a press conference on June 18, in which the League's President Professor Israel Shahak and lawyers Felicia Langer, Hanna Naqara and Ali Rafi' spoke about the detainees and the constant torture they are subjected to. They accused the Israeli authorities of violating the Geneva Convention.

- Over 100 mothers and wives of detainees addressed a letter to US President Richard Nixon during his recent visit to Israel in which they asked his personal intervention to obtain the release of their sons and husbands from jail. The letter states that the detainees have been allowed to meet their lawyers only once since their arrest five months ago, and that their relatives have not been allowed to visit them at all.

A similar memorandum was addressed by the Higher Islamic Committee of the West Bank to UN Secretary General Dr. Kurt Waldheim and to US President Nixon, in which the Committee's members demanded an end to the torture of political prisoners and their immediate release.

- Sit-in strikes were organised by the prisoners' families in Beit Sahour, Jerusalem, Nablus and other cities and towns of the occupied territories in protest against the arrests and the maltreatment of prisoners.

- Meetings of protest are being held daily in the occupied territories and by the democratic and peace forces in Israel protesting against the wave of arrests and the torture of prisoners. Delegations of the inhabitants of different cities in the occupied territories have been meeting with the Israeli military governors of their respective areas, demanding the prisoners' immediate release.

In the face of the growing protest inside the occupied territories and within Israel itself, Zionist elements — in connivance with the authorities — have started intimidating the prisoners' lawyers, who were in fact the first to uncover the facts about the prisoners' torture and maltreatment. Lawyer Felicia Langer, who is active in defending political prisoners, was the first to be intimidated. For a long time she had been receiving letters and telephone calls threatening her life, but events took a turn for the worse on June 13 when a number of thugs tried to force their way into her house in Jerusalem and plant a dynamite charge. Only her vigilance and that of her husband prevented a tragedy.

APPEAL FROM THE PRISONERS FAMILIES

"Our fathers, husbands, brothers and sons have been 'administratively detained' since April 22, 1974, because of — as the Israeli authorities then said — the celebrations of Israel's national day. They are still in prison without being charged . . . Many of them, as we have been informed by their lawyers, have been brutally tortured.

"We are not allowed to visit them, despite the fact that the legal period for interrogation has expired. The authorities still refuse to reveal the whereabouts of the prisoners Sulaiman Najjab, Mohammed Abu Gharbiyah, Abdullah Al-Beirat, Husni Haddad and others. The authorities are trying to justify their campaign of terror to the Israeli public by stating that the prisoners are members of "a sabotage organisation". The expression is being indiscriminately used by the authorities daily.

"The truth is that the prisoners, as the Israeli authorities and all democratic and peace-loving forces in Israel know, support a just peace in the Middle East and are staunch fighters against all forms of chauvinism wherever it manifests itself. They advocate a settlement of the Middle East conflict on the basis of international resolutions and respect for the rights of all peoples in the area.

"We consider their arrest and torture, as well as our being deprived of the right to visit them and concealment of the whereabouts of many of them, a blow directed against all efforts to achieve a just peace in the area, in addition to being a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"We warmly appeal to all those who champion justice and believe in democracy to protest against their arrest, demand an end to their torture and bring about their immediate release."